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Ruby Ridge a Strange Cause for Specter

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who once accused Anita Hill of "flat-out perjury" for contradicting herself during the Clarence Thomas hearings, is now having his own trouble with inconsistencies.

Specter has recently been keeping company with Randy Weaver, the white separatist whose 1992 standoff with federal agents at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, has become a cause celebre for the radical right. This might come as a surprise to Specter's presidential campaign contributors, who are counting on him to counter the "extremist fringe" of the GOP.

Since becoming the first Jewish candidate to seek the GOP presidential nomination, Specter has received a stack of antisemitic hate mail and two threats on his life. The vicious letters have called him epithets such as "kike" and "Adolph Specter," and one writer warned: "If you try to take [America] over, you will pay in blood of Jews, every man, woman and child."

Besides passing the threats on to the Secret Service and the Capitol Police, Specter is also using the slurs to shake the campaign money tree. In a recent fund-raising letter targeting Jewish voters, Specter listed the incendiary comments and then equated his personal battle against religious extremists to the Holocaust.

"My parents came here in the early 1900s to escape religious persecution and for the freedom and opportunity America afforded," Specter wrote. "Now I see the distinct possibility of the same storm clouds forming over America that we saw in Europe in the 1930s. . . . You and I have a moral obligation not to repeat the mistakes of the 1930s! . . . Won't you send a contribution of $500, $250, $100 or $50 today to help me in my efforts to stop the mixing of religion and politics? Even $25 would help."

Specter failed to mention to these contributors that he also sees a "cloud" hanging over federal law enforcement agents after their Waco-like siege of Weaver's mountain cabin. In recent months Specter has been conducting an investigation of the Weaver case that culminated in this week's congressional hearings.

"It's not right-wing or left-wing," Specter said of his investigation. "The politics doesn't really enter into it so far as I'm concerned. I think the Senate has a duty to find out what happened."

While the siege—in which Weaver's wife and son and a federal agent were killed—merits serious investigation, Specter has sidestepped the fact that there's an equally large "cloud" hanging over Weaver. Carrying Weaver's water is a curious way to try to prevent a repeat of the "horrors" of the 1930s.

Weaver has been linked to Aryan Nations, a group that advocates eliminating all blacks and Jews from the United States. Weaver has denied being a member of Aryan Nations, but he has admitted attending at least three of the group's conferences during the 1980s.

"Ambush at Ruby Ridge," a new book by Alan W. Bock that is generally sympathetic to Weaver, chronicles Weaver's connection to the Christian Identity movement. According to Bock, the movement "became entangled with anti-Semitic and cult beliefs in the 1930s."

Nevertheless, Specter is almost apologetic when it comes to Weaver. "He's got his rights," Specter told our associate Ed Henry. "And he may be getting a bum rap about what's been said about him. . . . I think that antisemitism has to be fought, and I also think that governmental excesses have to be fought. It's consistent."

Bock's book claims that Weaver later referred to his confrontation with the federal agents who had come to arrest him for failing to appear at a court date as a "ZOG/New World Order ambush." ZOG stands for "Zionist Occupational Government," an anti-Jewish phrase that was also plastered on a T-shirt that Weaver wore in a photo that recently appeared in Newsweek magazine.

Though Specter says the Weaver probe isn't politically motivated, both of his face-to-face meetings with Weaver took place in Iowa—where there just happens to be a very important presidential caucus next February. Specter told us the meeting place was purely coincidental since Weaver now lives in Iowa, where Specter happened to be campaigning.

While Specter has helped make a martyr of Weaver, he has not even met with the family of William Degan, the deputy U.S. marshal who was gunned down at Ruby Ridge. That shows a curious lack of respect for law enforcement from a former prosecutor like Specter, who has left the door open for a future meeting.

That might be small comfort to his tiny band of supporters, who are counting on him to take on the "extremist fringe" of the GOP.